USDA United States Department of Agriculture

Mt. Hood National Forest

Clackamas River Ranger District Fire Update

The Mt. Hood National Forest is working hard to reopen forest roads and recreation sites affected by last year's fires. Many of our severely burned areas will take years to recover. Our first priority is safety, and we ask for your patience as we continue to protect and maintain our public lands.

Post-Fire Hazard Trees

Hazard trees are dead or weak trees that pose a threat to public safety or infrastructure – such as roads, buildings, utilities, and campgrounds. Not all hazard trees look the same. Charred bark can cut off water and nutrients between the roots and the rest of the tree. Trees with thin bark are more sensitive and even a small bit of char is enough to kill the tree. Burned needles and leaves affect a tree's ability to go through photosynthesis, which is key to plant life. Weakened defenses from fires also make trees an easy target for insects that attack and kill trees over time.

Some damage isn't as obvious. Although a tree may have some green needles, it could have damaged roots that will kill the tree over time. Burned roots affect tree structure and increase the chance of blowdown by wind. Burning roots can smolder for seasons, popping up as holdover fires months or years later.

The Forest Service is responsible for mitigating known safety hazards on forest roads and developed recreation sites. Falling snags and branches, as well as other hazards such as falling rocks and debris can result in injuries or death. Forest roads are widely used by utility companies, emergency responders, landowners, employees, and recreational users.

If hazard trees are likely to fall on roads and recreation sites, the Forest will cut them. Many hazard trees will be left on site where we can improve wildlife, fish, or river habitat. Where feasible, hazard trees along roads and at developed sites may be removed to reduce future fire risks. Trees may also be removed as part of a roadside sale, used as fish logs for restoration projects, or made available for both commercial and non-commercial firewood.

Removing hazard trees from roadways and developed sites will cost tens of millions of dollars. The Forest does not have funding to complete this work. Selling some of the cut hazard trees enables the Forest to pay for the hazard tree work and restore public access. As fire-killed trees remain standing they continue to rot, become unstable, and likelier to fall. This increases the risk to the public, employees, and contractors. The Forest cannot open roads and recreation sites until these hazards are mitigated.

Over 95% of fire-killed and weakened trees will remain standing in place and be allowed to decompose naturally, as they don't pose a risk to roads and developed sites.

Recovery Work in Progress

Before recovery work begins, we methodically assess the damage and conduct environmental analysis (NEPA) for clean-up, repairs, or mitigation work. This process can take several months depending on conditions and damage severity. Once environmental analysis is complete and the project approved by forest leadership, work can begin.

Clackamas River Ranger District Fire Update

Here are a few projects currently underway:

We will soon sign a decision that will allow us to begin roadside fire recovery work along Forest Roads 46, 57, and 45, as well as other high priority roads. Trees that are imminent dangers to public roads and recreation sites have to be felled before these roads can be reopened.

Roadside work includes hazard tree evaluation & abatement, cleaning ditches, unplugging culverts, and repairing damaged guard rails. Hazard trees that have been cut down might be left in place or sold to pay for this work.

This spring recreation staff inventoried damaged infrastructure within campgrounds, boat launches, picnic areas, and trailheads. Infrastructure includes picnic tables, toilets, fire rings, water spigots, trash dumpsters, and signs. Several campgrounds suffered major damage by fire or fallen trees. Trees cut down in recreation sites and trails are mostly left behind to benefit wildlife habitat or made available for firewood.

Burned toilets, buildings, and vehicles contain a variety of hazardous materials and require extra testing, mitigation, and clean-up.

After weeks of hard work, Forest Road 4220 has now been cleared of hazard trees and reopened to Olallie Lake.

The Forest is also currently replacing safety and informational signs that have been damaged, stolen, or vandalized.

Olallie Lake Reopened July 22, 2021!

About 17,230 acres of the Lionshead Fire burned on Mt. Hood National Forest, including through the Olallie Lake area. As the fire was advancing, firefighters, forest and resort staff worked franticly to set up sprinkler systems and wrap buildings to protect the Olallie Resort before they were forced to evacuate. Thanks to their hard work and some good fortune, the resort and cabins were undamaged in the fire.

Hazard tree work on FR 4220 north of Olallie Lake

However, almost three miles of Forest Road 4220 leading to the lake had many fire-killed lodgepole pines that were preventing safe access to Burned Area Emergency Response projects. The Mt. Hood recreation and firefighter crews have spent the last month working to clear this portion of road leading to the Olallie Lake Resort and northside campgrounds.

The project did not include a commercial sale and cut material was left on site. This section of road was also shorter, flatter, and had relatively smaller trees- making it a simpler project than our other fire areas. We're glad we could complete the work to reopen a part of Forest Road 4220 and that the Olallie Lake Resort will be able to operate in 2021.

Closures

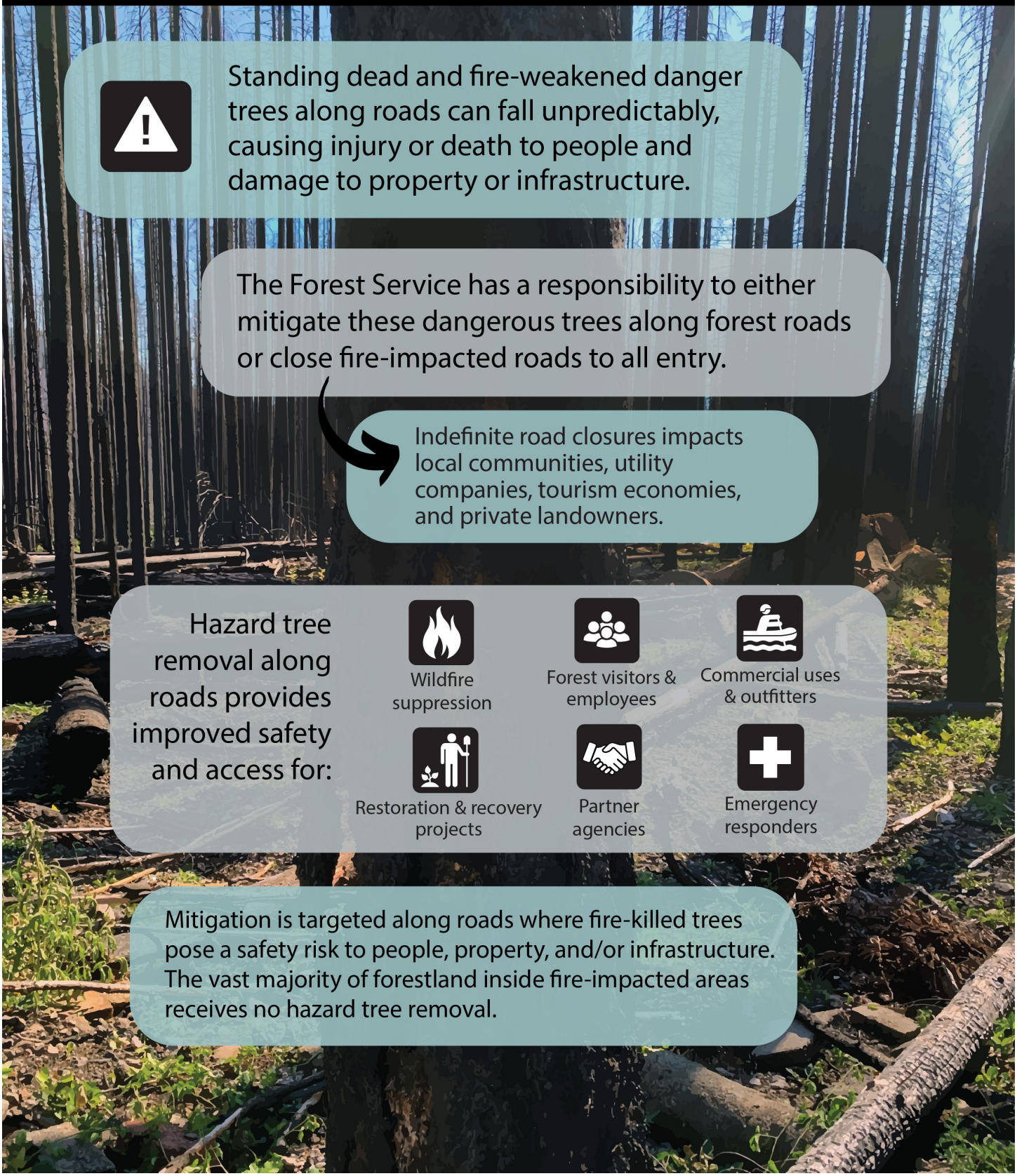
Please continue to respect closure areas for your safety and the safety of those employees and contractors working within the fire area. Potential hazards include falling trees and limbs, falling rocks, unstable ground, damaged roads, landslides, debris flows, and exposure to potentially toxic materials (hazmat).

For current closure maps and updates visit:
www.fs.usda.gov/goto/mthood/2020fires

More information:

Mt. Hood National Forest: www.fs.usda.gov/mthood
Mt. Hood on Facebook: www.facebook.com/mthoodnf
Mt. Hood on Twitter: https://twitter.com/mthoodnf
Mt. Hood 2020 Wildfires Info:
www.fs.usda.gov/goto/mthood/2020fires

Safety First: Hazard Trees



Standing dead and fire-weakened danger trees along roads can fall unpredictably, causing injury or death to people and damage to property or infrastructure.

The Forest Service has a responsibility to either mitigate these dangerous trees along forest roads or close fire-impacted roads to all entry.

Indefinite road closures impacts local communities, utility companies, tourism economies, and private landowners.

Hazard tree removal along roads provides improved safety and access for:

- Wildfire suppression
- Forest visitors & employees
- Commercial uses & outfitters
- Restoration & recovery projects
- Partner agencies
- Emergency responders

Mitigation is targeted along roads where fire-killed trees pose a safety risk to people, property, and/or infrastructure. The vast majority of forestland inside fire-impacted areas receives no hazard tree removal.